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Grant, George M.



Sermon

PREACHED AT THE

NATIONAL SCOTCH CHURCH,

SAINT MATTHEW'S, HALIFAX,

ON THE MORNING OF

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF 1866.

By REV. GEORGE M. GRANT, A. M.

HALIFAX, N. S.

PRINTED BY JAMES BOWES & SONS.

1866.





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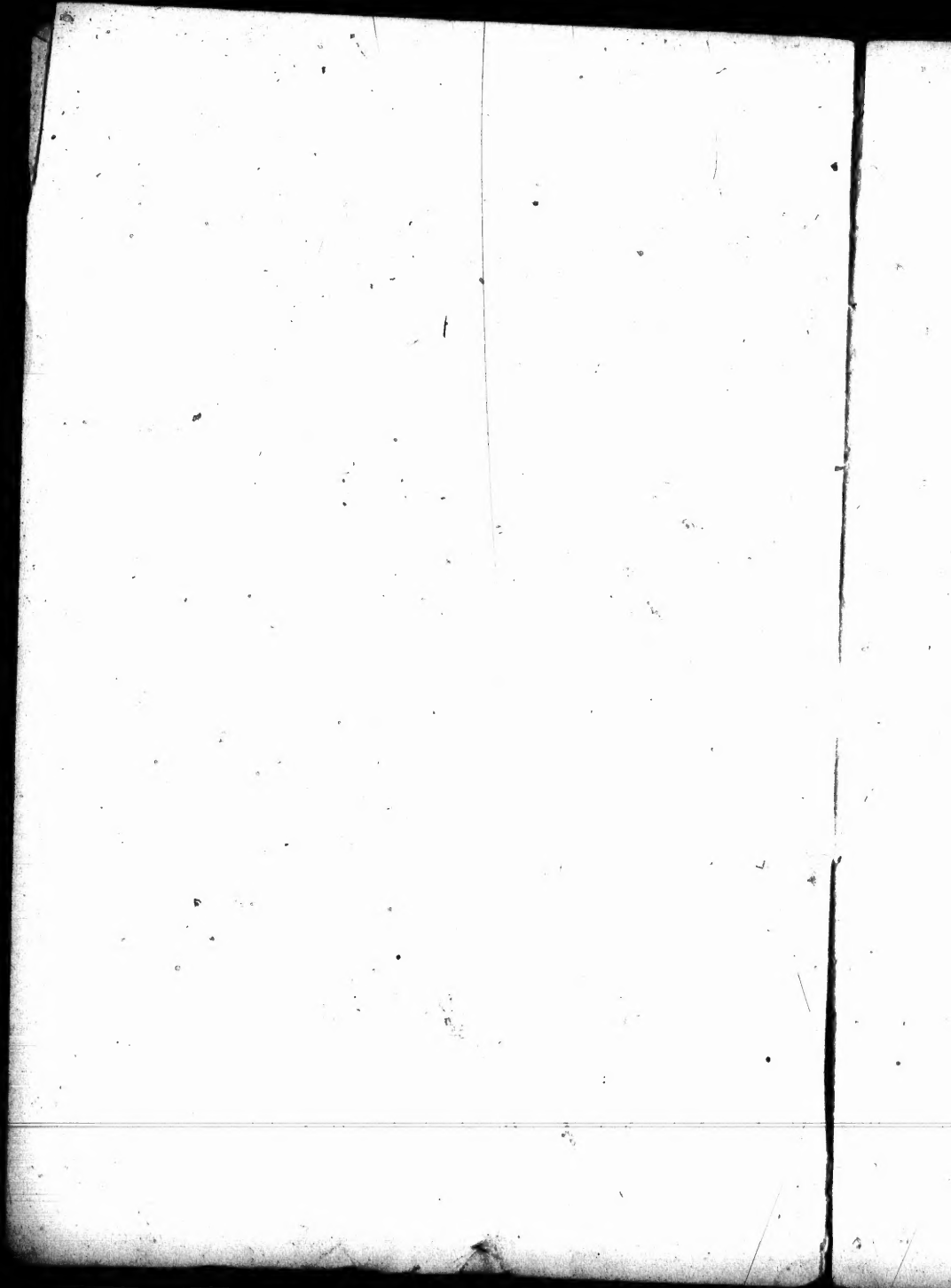
THE FIRST SUNDAY OF 1866.

By REV. GEORGE M. GRANT, A. M.

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HALIFAX, 18th January, 1866.

Rev. and Dear Sir,

WE are assured that it would be gratifying to your congregation, and we believe instructive to young persons of the community, if you would allow the Sermon preached by you on the first Sunday of this year, to be published.

With a view to this, we now solicit the favor of a copy of it.

JAMES McNAB,
SANFORD FLEMMING,
WILLIAM SUTHERLAND,
JOHN DOULL,
ROBT. NOBLE,
JOHN W. YOUNG,
WM. M. ALLAN.

To the Rev. GEORGE M. GRANT.

THE MANSE, HALIFAX.

Gentlemen,

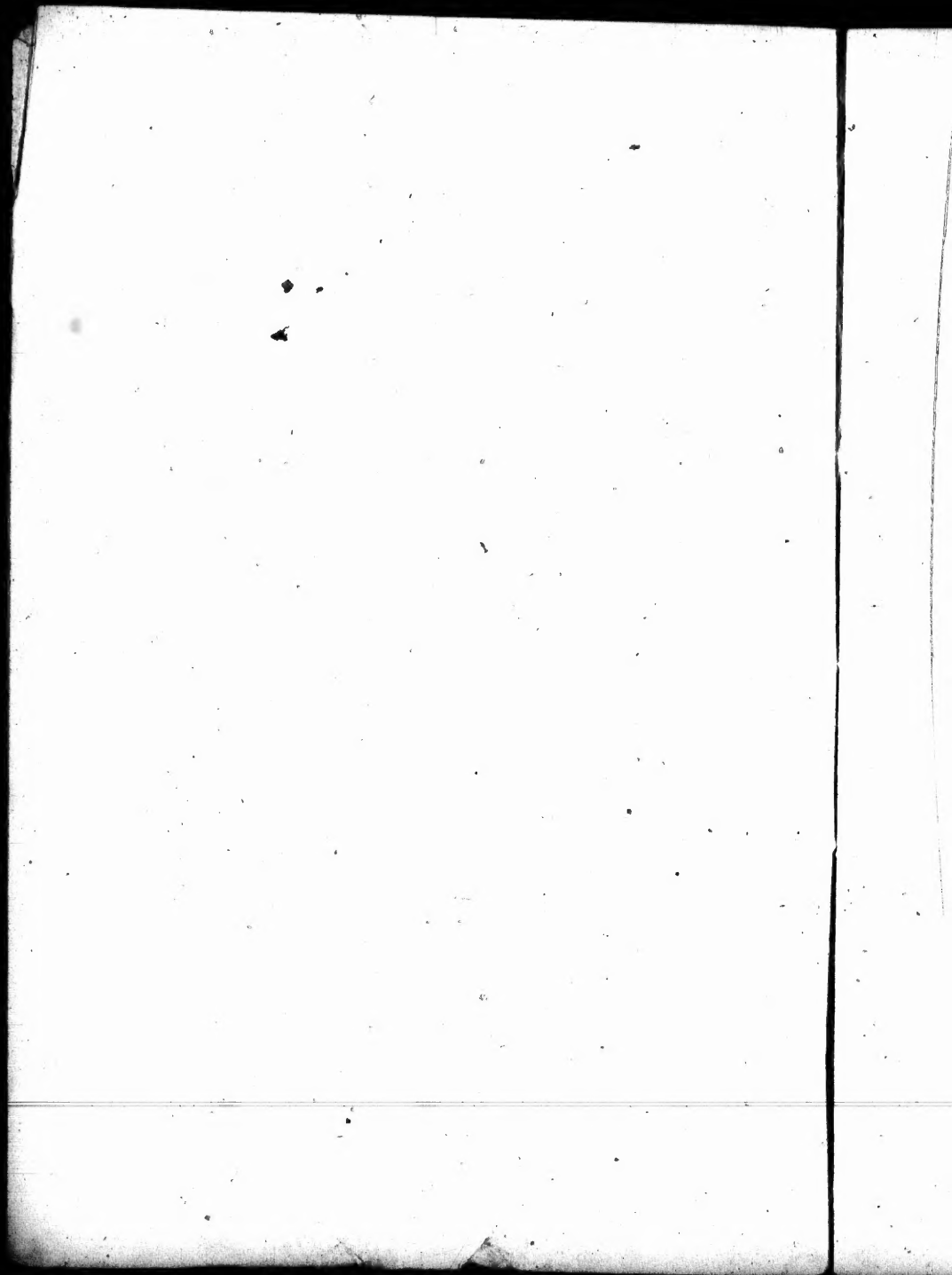
I have much pleasure in acceding to your request.

Believe me,

Yours, &c.,

• GEORGE MONRO GRANT.

To the Honorable JAMES McNAB, and others.



Sermon.

"Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free."—Gal. v. 1.

I.—LIBERTY, in the lowest sense of the word, is the possession of our own limbs and life for our own purposes and use. If others hold us as their property, we are called slaves. If confined in a prison, for the time being we are slaves. The will of our master, or the walls of the prison, define our movements and the nature and manner of our work. In either case we are said to be deprived of that 'personal liberty' which is our inalienable right, unless we have used or will certainly use it for the injury of others or of ourselves. Such are its bounds and conditions; but within that ample room and verge every man must claim its full exercise; for though lowest, it is all the more necessary as the base of the pyramid of a perfect human nature and life.

Men may enjoy 'personal liberty' yet hold it by a precarious tenure. A *lettre de cachet* or some more modern form expressive of arbitrary power, may consign any citizen to a dungeon, or bring him before a tribunal to be tried by laws which he has had no hand in making, and which he does not recognize as just. Such a state is not 'politically free,' although the jails may be empty and oppression never attempted. While in another country citizens are arrested daily by policemen, locked up in prison, tried by rigid process, and sentenced to extreme penalties, and yet we may truly boast of it as possessed of absolute political freedom. The laws are acknowledged by all to be just, and to be uniform in their application. If defective, there are free Parliaments to appeal unto for

their amendment. Every good subject has made the laws a part of himself, feels it no hardship to obey them, and condemns all unwise tampering with them. Political freedom then does not mean exemption from laws any more than personal freedom. Neither the one nor the other can be enjoyed except through willing obedience to laws regulative and superior. Yea the very essence of the former is that men should surrender a portion of their natural liberty in order to enjoy the rest of it securely.

And likewise intellectual freedom is not incompatible with the acknowledgment of necessary conditions, laws and limits within which alone thinking is safe or even possible, while intellectual slavery is the accepting of arbitrary restrictions on thought, or arbitrary limits to inquiry. And there is no social freedom where a man is compelled to hold his peace or to echo the sentiments of the majority under the penalty of that insidious social terrorism which is the most dangerous persecution; while the cynicism that always sneers at old and generally received beliefs or forms, and would emancipate us from the legitimate claims of authority, is a burlesque on the liberty of the individual, and would bring chaos back again.

Again, we see a man possessed of power and wealth and intellect, free to go where and do or say what he pleases, and yet we call him a slave, because he is driven hither and thither like a rudderless bark by appetites and passions that have usurped the mastery over him. Though he yields them a willing obedience, we rightly denominate him slave. He may be obeying the law of his nature, but that law has not right divine: his nature has been perverted to call good evil and evil good. The whole life of another may be in apparently perfect conformity to the laws of righteousness; but if so only because punishments deter him from transgression and rewards are connected with obedience, we do not consider him truly free. True, he is not ruled by the basest parts of his

nature: the calmer, steadier, worthier principle of self-love is his rule of life. Still he is not the friend, but the slave of duty. The fear of disgrace, the fear of ill-health, the fear of hell; the hope of position, wealth, or of heaven are his only motives to right-doing. He is honest because "honesty is the best policy." His goodness is a refined far-seeing selfishness. He discharges his religious obligations, as he pays his debts,—as the price he must pay for eternal happiness. If happiness were attached to wrong-doing, he would do wrong.

On the other hand; there are men confined to hard monotonous daily tasks all their life time, "toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing," and whether they work for themselves or for others, we call them free; not because they enjoy personal, political or mental liberty, but because they accept the relationships that surround them as eternally right and good, as what they most desire and would not free themselves from if they had the power. They follow out their own views of what is highest and best, and those views are true. They are free, though under law and subjected to what others might consider cruel necessities, privations, and constraints. Life is an infinite joy to them, dashed betimes with bitter experiences.

Man's birthright is liberty. His deepest instincts revolt from every form of slavery. We sing with flushed cheeks the songs of freedom, and the name of Wallace or Sydney stirs our blood like the blast of a trumpet. We bring garlands to the tombs of those who died rather than submit to chains on their freeborn limbs or their free Fatherland. And more heroic far are those who have fought against the serfdom of the human mind, who have not feared the strength of stupidity and ignorance, who through faith in truth have broken the bars clamped around thought to its foul dishonor, who from love of truth have faced the most sweeping social ban. And, rising into the realm of the moral and spiritual, "greater is he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city."

Yet the world is full of slavery. Timidity and ambition and interest all seek to impose it, and in one way or another it has seized upon and attempted to hold every part of man's nature, and the history of the race is a history of the resulting conflicts and of the mutual successes and failures, slavery alas! counting most of the successes. A cause equally radical and universal alone can have produced so comprehensive an effect. To know this cause, and to know what and how much freedom is possible to us, we must clearly understand wherein liberty essentially consists.

II. All our illustrations have led us to see that liberty is not incompatible with law, but rather that it implies law or right. Suppose then a self-determining power in the will, and the idea of liking as well as law, and we have the characteristics of a free act. For a man may obey law, and not be free: and he may do what he likes and not be free. He is free when he delights to follow the nature God gave him; when he approves of the law within and gladly obeys it. The brutes indeed obey the laws of their natures; yet are they not free. For what they do, they must do, as far as we can judge. They possess in themselves no self-determining power that would enable them to violate present inclination at the suggestion of other motives and inducements. Hence there is no merit, because no moral element in their strict adherence to nature. They are invested neither with the dignity nor the perils of responsibility.

But with a freedom similar to that which is the perfection of Deity was man endowed when made in His image. His nature was built up of many parts, lower and higher, ruled and ruling, but the whole as a whole tending in its normal exercise to happiness and God. It was constructed with reference to the two worlds to which he was kin, and it was as free on the material as on the spiritual side, in as far as the

material can be free like the spiritual. Full and harmonious development of every part of it was necessary to its perfection. Lowest down were the appetites, passions and desires, the due gratification of which was part of the happiness and part of the education intended for him. Over these as regulating principles, were a self-love leading him to seek his own good, and a principle of benevolence leading him to seek the good of others.* And then highest and supreme, a conscience which combined with judgment took authoritative review of his whole nature and life, pronounced on everything submitted to it a sentence of approval or disapproval, and a freedom of will in virtue of which he could take one course of conduct or its opposite. An awful power that of choosing the evil with a constitution that inclined him to the good and made him feel that with the good was obligation and true happiness, but a power essential to the idea of freedom!

Did freedom require man thus constituted to cast himself loose from duty, to dethrone the higher parts of his nature and give supremacy to the lower; to obey impulse rather than self-love, and benevolence at the expense of conscience? Surely not, but the reverse; for such a freedom would have implied a positive obligation to sin, and could only end in his total enslavement to those passions that made him "half akin to brute." No; it was his to be the mirror on earth of the life of God; to be the high-priest of all nature, that it through him might beat time in all 'its flood of being and storm of action' with the majestic pulses of the universe,—as far as his own nature went, to let "pure law commensure perfect freedom." For where do we find our highest idea of liberty? In Him who 'for His own glory foreordains whatsoever comes to pass.' But His liberty is not capriciousness: it is one with immutable law. Hence in fact the

* On this Constitution of human nature, see Bishop Butler's three great Sermons.

necessity for an atonement when once the constitution of nature has been broken, and the punishment attached to transgression by righteous irrevocable decree is demanded. God was not free to pardon the sinner, although—

“God is love indeed,
And love Creation's final law.”

Had He been thus free, He would at once have pardoned the angels who fell. Then would it have been proclaimed to the wide universe that there was no sacredness in law, yea rather that a bribe was attached to transgression. And no longer would eternal processes move on in their serene orbits, but confusion would rush in everywhere, and all would be lost to gratify a selfish love. Here was the problem that had to be solved when God would be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. What must be manifested was not a one-sided unjust love, but a love in law; for we need law as much as we need love. And no man can begin to understand the atonement of Jesus Christ, until he appreciates to the full this difficulty.

To resume; man was left “to the freedom of his own will:” and in that was implied the possibility of his violating the constitution that had been given him. The possibility became a terrible fact. And from that day to this man has been struggling for the old freedom which he felt belonged to him by right, but for the most part in every department of his nature he has been struggling in vain. No cry has had such potency with him or such vitality as the cry for “liberty:” but the greatest enemy he has had to encounter has been himself: his truest longings and efforts too often ended in maddest excess and folly, like “sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh.” When Christ came to the world, where was liberty of any kind to be found? Its light had led astray, and men had ceased almost to hope for it or think of it. And even yet the masses of the race are serfs. Political liberty is confined

to three or four nations. Intellectual and moral slavery is the rule rather than the exception. "The corruption that is in the world through lust" has troubled the once clear waters and made them "like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt," and they cannot be healed till the prophet of the Lord cast salt from the new cruse into the spring head.

III. Thus, then, we are brought to ask what is that liberty in which St. Paul encourages the vacillating Galatians to stand fast. The old liberty in its essence was that man should follow his exquisitely balanced nature, rejoicing in its excellence and so perfecting it to all its rightful issues. The new liberty then must mean the restoration of conscience—the great fly-wheel of the human system—to its place of rightful authority with more than its old sanctions, and the readjustment of all our powers with new motives to obedience. All that is implied in conversion from sin to holiness through the Spirit of Christ. There is a wider, nobler liberty than the old, a higher law within which it is to work, and a new preserving power in the indwelling of the Spirit which moulds our nature into oneness with the law. We had admitted foreign elements into our constitution which disorganized the whole machinery and destroyed the general balance, insomuch that had it not been for the many practical checks in Providence which prevented the evil from working out its own consequences fully, our debasement would have been more speedy and radical than the darkest description in history shows it to have been. And when once the wrong was done, it was from the nature of the case impossible that it could be made right by us. Water may fall below, but cannot rise above its level. Our course must have been steadily downward if no external force could be brought in to bear upon us. Hence the necessity, first for a revelation to show unto us our

real state and to convince us that it led to death. But such a revelation could by itself do nothing except witness against us to the face. It was also necessary that human nature should be set right again, a new experiment or start made, and a new power added to keep it from falling. This was done in Jesus Christ. Through faith, we are united to him. And in that union to Him, we are delivered from the slavish fear and dread which sprang from the consciousness of unpardoned sin; and the law and power of sin in our members is cast out; and we feel ourselves translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and in His service experience the perfect liberty of children living in the Father's house. The law or eternal boundary lines within which that liberty acts is the Gospel, which is therefore called "the law of faith" or "the perfect law of liberty." So that in this highest state of freedom we are "not without law to God, but under law to Christ." We do not make void the law, although we are not bound to it in its Jewish form. God forbid: yea we love the law; and our only claim of right is "*we will walk at liberty; for we seek thy precepts.*"

And, mark! this Christian liberty puts right not only the centre of man's being, but heals all its diseases and hallows all its activities; puts him right not only with his God, but also with nature and his fellows, with time as well as eternity. Nature is no longer a means of corrupting the soul; but as much God's as grace is, and the two kingdoms are seen to fit into each other and so make one. For nature's religion was always true, if men had only read it aright. It speaks more impressively than ever words could speak of freedom and law; of irreversible punishments and sure rewards; of beauty and goodness; of death and resurrection; of bounty and sacrifice. Oh! we could no more do without nature than without the Bible. The one is the living key to and the living commentary on the other. Dwarfed and meagre is that man's religion

who divorces himself from nature,—from the glory of the rising sun, of the groves and hills, of the rain and the resounding sea ; or from his own kind, to whom converge all the lines of nature, in whom we have its representative and mouthpiece. For the whole universe is one : not a great collocation of bits or spheres of life. There is the one great tree of life, reaching unto the heaven of heavens, its laws uniform, and its life God. And the free, happy soul goes out into all its Father's broad domain, the religion of love sanctifying his joy in it, and making inquiry without limit safe. And the young man may rejoice in his youth, and let his heart cheer him in the days of his youth ; and may walk in the ways of his heart and in the light of his eyes, for heart and eyes and youth, and the fullness and freshness and light of life are from the Father : and he enjoys all, knowing that he must render account not only hereafter, but now, and to Christ, who has no evil eye nor grudging heart. I mean that the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free is not confined to our direct relationship with God. He has done more than saved us from our sins and secured heaven for us. He has done what we too often ignore or refuse to give him credit for. He has gained and consecrated this world for us. Remember how much this means ; for it takes a great many kinds of men and of activities to make a world ; but He has anew given dominion over it all to man, over its work, recreations and relationships, all to be used with perfect liberty in their respective places and subordinations. And as a world-historical fact, such has ever been His influence where He has been received. Whence the elevation of Christendom above a rotten heathenism and the stagnation of Mohammedanism ! From Him are the peculiar truths that lie at the basis of our social and national condition, and all the stimulating and leavening influences which are the living springs of our improvements and illimitable hopes. Thus, from the one truth of the moral

self-responsibility of every man, not only religious but political freedom necessarily results; insomuch that the fact is that until religious freedom was fought out and attained, no one dreamed of such a thing as political freedom. The two blessings are indeed one that branches out into two forms according as it deals with man as a citizen of heaven or as a citizen of earth. Or as the great modern advocate of absolutism puts this: "It is the same folly, having changed only its epoch and name."* And as with politics so with the whole of our life in the flesh. In no case does He put on us a yoke of prescribed outward tasks. If the heart is right, the life will not be wrong. In a word, the freedom possessed by Christ's freemen is expressed in St. Augustine's maxim, "Love God, and do what you please."

Here, then, is the definition of our liberty. It consists in following our nature, Christ being the lord of our conscience, and in our thus making "the best of both worlds." And here the difficulty presents itself which caused some worthy people to object to the tone of the teaching I addressed to you on last New Year's morning. Their objections, though not very articulately stated, have, I believe, been felt none the less, and may, I think, be clearly expressed thus: "Does this view of life you give take sufficient account of man as a sinner, of the utter corruption of our nature, and of the need of conversion? Is not St. Paul's distinction one between that which is natural and that which is spiritual, instead of between the material and spiritual, and does he not enjoin the crucifying of the natural including under it much that we ordinarily include under the material or sensuous? In short, are we able, according to St. Paul's theory, or is it possible in practice to harmonize the cross with 'the best of both worlds?'" Such is the position of Puritanism, and doubtless it has "the root of

* Le Maistre: "Du Pape," p. 22.

the matter" in it; but whether it has the whole matter or not is a very different thing. Certainly with such views it is impossible for men to feel, though they may not know how to deny, that religion includes the realm of nature, revelling in its boundless beauty and force and melodies; or all that robust, cheery, ordinary life that takes pleasure without check of conscience in the good things of the world; or the play of fancy, or song, or art, or the thousand-and-one visions of delight and objects of desire that spread out in endless succession to an unseen horizon in the spring and summer time of life: and in consequence, when they do attempt to harmonize the material or imaginative with the spiritual life, the attempts are constrained and awkward, and the success met with very poor and perhaps anything but advantageous either to their lower or higher life. To them, this world can only be "a city of destruction," from which it is their great duty to escape; each cup of pleasure an object of dread, lest there be poison at the bottom. And though they know well that other parts of Scripture, and especially the teachings of the Master, express very different views, yet as they cannot harmonize the two they confine themselves to the truths they have most deeply felt. Their theology then, instead of being the science that underlies and overlies all others, and therefore the most interesting of all, seems to the fervent young soul, to whom it may be offered as food, the driest and most barren of all, being chiefly, as he thinks, a string of scholastic subtleties and carefully worded articles; and religion an uncomely asceticism, or a strange mysticism; the prize of a favored few instead of the life of the world.

Is there not, then, a higher truth in which those different theories of life are reconciled without the sacrifice of a single drop of evangelical truth? I believe there is, and that it is this: "All things gathered together in one, even in Christ." We are His, to possess all in Him as an inheritance, to stand

fast in the liberty wherewith, He hath made us free. As to those profound truths, brought out more fully by St. Paul than by any other Scripture writer, of the awful power of the sin that is in us, of our need of a new life and of constant watchfulness against the corruptions of the old, they are the very essence of all that is special in Christianity, and must always and everywhere be preached. But what is this new life to be? Certainly not the suppression or abolition of a single affection of our nature; but the restoration of the primeval balance, with new sanctions, and strength added and offered. It is indeed true, as Bishop Butler points out,* that St. Paul uses the word nature in two senses, a good and a bad sense; and it is partly from overlooking that fact that some of the best men who ever lived could find in Christianity only an extreme Puritanism. For he frequently speaks of nature as consisting in those passions which do actually most influence the lives of men: and as those were vicious passions, he spoke of mankind as vicious by nature, as when he says "the Gentiles who were dead in trespasses and sins were by nature the children of wrath." But then elsewhere he speaks of the Gentiles "doing by nature the things contained in the law," and thus being "a law to themselves," and that through the moral government of conscience; for they "shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." Here he refers to the normal constitution of our nature,—the nature that is to be purified and developed, not crucified; and no man is clearer than he in asserting the rehabilitation of our whole nature in Christ, and the consecration in Him of its lowest and highest spheres of activity, and its right to full exercise in an atmosphere of perfect freedom.

* Bishop Butler's Sermon II.

Is it said, 'such freedom may do for the mature Christian, but it is dangerous to preach it to all?' I answer, have not I the same right to address all here as Christians as St. Paul had to address the members of the Galatian Churches indiscriminately by that holy name? Have you not all been baptized into His name, and does not your presence here with the multitude who keep holy day prove that you have no wish to cast off the profession of your allegiance? Neither have you been excommunicated, and I have no intention of drawing distinctions between some of you as believers and others as unbelievers. I take you on your own profession as long as your conduct does not openly belie that profession, and I will not usurp Christ's office of deciding which is wheat and which is chaff. Yea, more, I hope and believe that Christ is in most of your hearts, though many of you are babes when you ought to be strong men. Know well that whatever sorrow for sin, whatever desires after a higher purity and holiness, whatever truth and justice, whatever mercy and forbearance are in your hearts, are Christ in you; and as you encourage those, you encourage Him to dwell in you more richly. For the ideas of power and wisdom, of truth and love, are the highest realities; and what else but those make up our idea of Godhead. And know also that every part of your nature has been baptized into the name of Christ, and ought not, therefore, to be crushed out or trodden under foot of men. Realize, then, intelligently and fearlessly, the liberty you have in Christ, and live as the Lord's freemen. Such preaching to a Christian congregation is not dangerous, except in as far as all liberty is dangerous. And "for all the evils that freedom produces there is only one cure, and that cure is freedom." For this highest freedom is like all its lower forms—not the licentiousness that is divorced from law, but is one with that loftiest law which sweeps round God's throne—not a law of com-

mandments contained in ordinances set over against us to excite in us the motions of sin and to cause offences to multiply; but a law mellowed by the attributes of personality, consecrated by the death and resurrection of our Lord, and blended with our own holiest endeavors. This is the way: walk ye in it: and oh that you would reach forward unto perfection!

Young men—my brothers—you Christ calls. He trusts you. To you at least faith, trust, purity, love, constancy, sacrifice, liberty, are not meaningless words—but the very wine of life. Let us go forward. Giving only one look of regret back on the dead past which has been to us too much of an enchanted ground, let us enter the future with simple faith and earnest resolve. The river has become broader and deeper, and is nearer the great ocean than when we gazed on it from the last hill-top like this one on which we now stand. Well, it may bear for us a statelier and more heavily freighted ship. Go forth then to the work given you to do, and in virtue of the liberty wherewith Christ makes you free, follow your nature, and Christ will give to each seed “his own body.”

“Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to Sovereign power.”

Think and examine fearlessly, speak honestly, act fairly, and may God make this unto you

A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

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